

Remarks by the Honorable Sean O'Keefe
NASA Administrator
Florida Quarter Ceremony
Kennedy Space Center Visitors Center
April 7, 2004

Thank you Jim (Jim Kennedy, Director NASA Kennedy Space Center) for that very thoughtful introduction. Yes, let me reassure you all that he is no relation to the original Kennedy's, but the name didn't hurt a bit when it came around to the idea of deciding who would be the director here. He's been a long serving member of the NASA family for the better part of 28 years, many of which were spent here at the Kennedy Space Center, but also around the Agency. We're very pleased to be led by him here at the Kennedy Space Center. Fantastic job Jim. Keep it up.

I'm most honored to represent NASA here today with Governor Bush, Director of the United States Mint For, my good friend Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Bodman and with Scott Kelly (NASA astronaut), godspeed my friend, we're counting on you for a tremendous mission as well. And I'll have the pleasure of introducing Sam in a few moments as well.

This is indeed a great day for the state of Florida, and for the entire country as we unveil a beautiful quarter that appropriately celebrates this gorgeous state and our nation's Gateway to Discovery.

The design highlights three unique and widely recognized symbols of Florida: A Spanish Galleon, sabal palm trees, and NASA's Space Shuttle. All are linked to the spirit of exploration and discovery.

When Ponce de León's Galleons arrived on Florida's shores in 1513, he named this land in honor of the Easter season we are now celebrating. He

initiated centuries of Spanish exploration, settlement, and religious instruction among the native populations that forever changed the people and history of this great state.

Although Spanish galleons are historically associated with gold, they also symbolize treasure in the form of information, cultural diversity, and vast exchange networks or the movement of ideas, people, and goods around this globe.

In addition to highlighting Florida's diverse natural bounty, the presence of palm trees on the quarter demonstrates how exploration often results in new knowledge about the wonders of creation.

And so it is fitting that at this very location, with its origins based in exploration and discovery that similarly we learning about a unique environment in our corner of the universe, the ancient salty sea that our Mars Exploration Rover Opportunity has so successfully investigated in a place now we know as

Meridiani Planum on the planet Mars, that launched from right here.

Fittingly, Opportunity and her sister rover Spirit...Actually that's not right. Soffi Collis, the ten-and-a-half year old young lady who named the rovers, told me just yesterday that Spirit is a girl and Opportunity is a boy. (Laughter) And she was there for the launching of Opportunity this past summer. And it's appropriate again that both were launched from the sandy beaches of this state to explore the sandy soil of Mars just a year ago. It's astounding that all of this occurred in just a short amount of time.

As the new Florida quarter wonderfully illustrates, this is the place where America's space exploration dreams take flight.

For 54 years, the United States has launched rockets, satellites and spaceships from this unique patch of Atlantic coastal land just a few miles from here.

And as Jim Kennedy noted, it was 23 years ago this month that the Space Shuttle Columbia first soared into the heavens from this area.

We are very proud that America's space program heritage is being recognized on the Florida quarter.

With our new vision for exploration which was announced in January by a leader who's widely recognized here in the state of Florida as the Governor's brother (Laughter)...thanks to him we now are developing exciting plans to return to the Moon, and go on to explore Mars and the expanse of our solar system with a combination of human and robotic explorers.

Of course the spaceships that will take us to these places will begin their epic journeys right here on the space coast in Florida.

The next chapter in this story that began with Mercury, that continued with Gemini, on to Apollo,

and the Shuttle program will now move on to project Constellation.

Next month we will announce a new class of astronauts, including our first group of educator astronauts, who will join Barbara Morgan as the first, all of whom will help us carry our exploration vision to heights unimagined and frontiers unknown.

I wish to thank Florida's first lady Columba Bush for assisting us with the Educator Astronaut selection process. She came to Washington last year to help NASA kick off the recruitment of this new group of extraordinary folks who will translate the explorer experience to students through their unique expertise as educators. And I thank you Mrs. Bush for your tremendous assistance with that process. We appreciate it very much. (Applause)

In addition to performing regular missions on the Space Shuttle and International Space Station, the educator astronauts will also help to inspire that next

generation of explorers who will extend our exploration horizons throughout the solar system. I am thrilled that so many young people who will make up that next generation of explorers are here with us today.

The American people rightly treasure the state of Florida for being a gateway to continuous discovery. For our part, I can assure you that the dedicated men and women of NASA are honored to light the candle for our journeys of exploration and discovery in this wonderful state, and grateful for the inclusion of the Space Shuttle on this very special quarter.

It is now my pleasure to introduce one of the people responsible for this new entry into the legal realm of coinage of the United States, my great friend Deputy Secretary Samuel Bodman.

The Deputy Secretary grew up in Illinois, and he spent much of his career in Boston, working as a professor of chemical engineering at MIT, later as

President of Fidelity Investments...It's a natural transition from chemical engineering straight to investments and back...So again he's very, very versatile. He's amazing. Given all the time he's lived in these cold weather locations, and now in rainy damp Washington, where we live as well, I'm sure he relishes the opportunity to be here in these spectacular sunny Florida climes. With that I welcome my good friend Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Bodman.